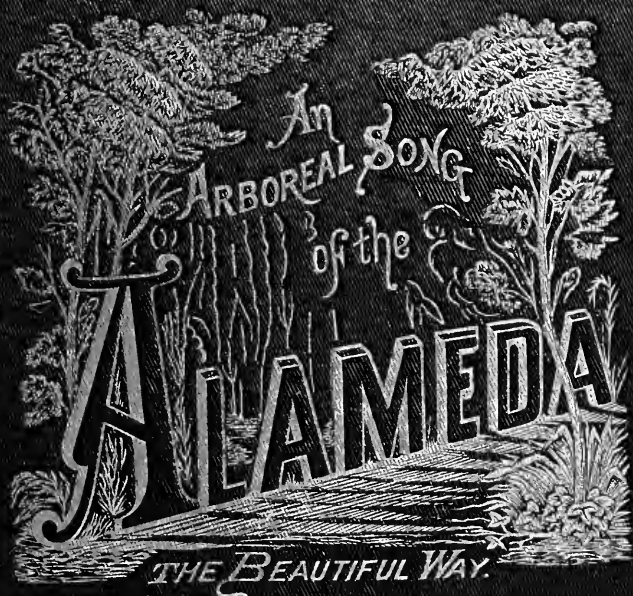


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AN ARBOREAL SONG
OF
THE ALAMEDA

(The Beautiful Way.)

PRESENTED TO
THE LADIES' BENEVOLENT SOCIETY
OF SAN JOSE, CAL.

BY
MRS. MARY H. FIELD

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San Francisco

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NOTE

"The Avenue of Willows connecting San Jose with Santa Clara Mission was planted in 1799, under the supervision of Father Maguin de Catala. He employed two hundred Indians to plant, water and protect them until they became sufficiently large to need no care. They were of much value to the inhabitants of both settlements not only as shade, but as protection against the assaults of the cattle which were feeding over the valley."

Hall's History of San Jose.







LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



"I AM GNARLED AND GRAY AND OLD,"	-	-	-	11	✓
"TIS THE HIGHWAY OF THE LORD!"	-	-	-	21	✓
"BEAUTIFUL DWELLINGS STOOD HALF REVEALED,"	-	-	-	29	✓
"ITS WALLS HAVE CRUMBLLED DOWN,"	-	-	-	33	✓





THE ALAMEDA

(The Beautiful Way.)



AN ARBOREAL SONG.



THE song of an ancient tree,
Which it softly crooned to me,
As I walked on an autumn day
In the Alameda—the beautiful way—
The pride and the joy of San José.

Was the wind the wandering troubadour
Who swept for me his wild harp strings,
Or did Hamadryad's soul outpour
Its mystical, musical murmurings?

“Ah me!” it sighed, “Ah me!
What a weary while is a century!
I am gnarled and gray and old,
Shattered and furrowed,—Ah, behold
My very heart is a-cold, a-cold!
Yet the century’s years are still untold
But age is the time for dreaming,
And I live in a tranced land,
Where the long dead past to me doth stand
Too real, too close, for seeming;
Where the dim and the far still seem most
near,
And the long-hushed voices fall most clear.



“I hear them talking,—the friars all,
The gray old Mission Fathers nine,—
As they sit in the long refectory hall,
Lingering over bread and wine ;
While swart of brow and lithe of limb,
A dusky edge to the picture’s rim,
The Indian Neophytes serving stand,
Alert for a word or a beckoning hand.

“Father Maguin de Catala’s voice,
Speaking in soft Castilian phrase,
Is heard above the murmurous noise:

‘ Pardon, my brothers,’ he gently says,
‘ If my thought seems weak or wild,
Like the famous schemes of the errant knight,
With the zeal of a man and the heart of a
child,
Whose deeds Cervantes doth indite!

“ ‘ But our blessed religion doth bid us be
Filled with compassionate charity;
And, O, how wearily to and fro
Our faithful flock do come and go!
Scorched by sun and beaten by rain,
Or choked with the dust of the arid plain,
Where the fierce wild cattle roam at will
And the weak and the helpless with terror
fill,—

“ ‘So that only through peril and fear and woe
To the sacred rites of the church they go.
O brothers, hear and approve my plan
For the glory of God and the good of man!
Let us plant some trees whose greenery
A screen from the burning sun shall be;
Whose firm-set trunks may keep at bay
The red-eyed bull from his fainting prey,
And whose grateful shade on us may fall,
When, with reverent and uncovered head,
We move with slow and solemn tread
In the Corpus Christi Processional.’

“Then Father Serra shook his head.
‘Good brother de Catala,’ he said,
‘Is a league of forest so small a thing
That it lies within our compassing?
Let us level the mountains that round us lie!
Let us dip with a gourd old ocean dry!
Let us pluck the stars down out of the sky!’

“Then the Fathers Peña and Palou smiled,
But others spoke in approval mild,
And one was absorbed in revery deep,
While one good brother fell fast asleep.

Still the Friar de Catala looked as one
Whose dauntless faith beholds as done
That which his warm heart bids him plan
For the glory of God and good of man!

“ Behind him, attent and still and bright,
Waited a dark-eyed Acolyte.

He lightly bent to the father's ear
With a whispered word of love and cheer,—
‘ Holy Father! the work shall speed,
Many and strong are the men for the deed,
And wherever the cooling waters flow
There the thirsty willows crowding grow.’

The father turned on the eager youth
His gentle glance, and 'Thou speakest truth,
Benedicite!' murmured he,
'Doubt and delay shall before it flee.'

"Again a turn of shifting sands:
I feel the wrench of cruel hands
Tearing me loose from the dear cool earth
Where we lithe young willows had our birth,
Bearing us off forever
From the sweet clear rippling river;
The swirl and rush of its winter flood,
The lingering kiss of its summer mood,
Gone from our lives forever!

“ But hundreds of willing hands
Are planting us deep anew;
Hundreds of willing hands
The fresh mold o’er us strew;
Hundreds of tawny hands,
Slim and unused to toil,
Wondering at the white man’s endless fret
and moil,
Yet striving the good friar’s mysterious will
to do.

“ It is done, it is done at last!
Like sentinels arrayed,
A triple line of willows cast
A league of flickering shade.

Still there were scoffers to say
‘They are only there to die,
It is labor thrown away,—
The next year will be dry.’

“ ‘Then we will plant them again!’
Said Father de Catala’s voice,
‘And your children’s children, O men!
Shall yet in their shade rejoice.

“ ‘Our Mission will pass away
When its time of need is past.
It will have its use and day,
But the race of trees and men will last!’

“When the weary friar slept that night
There hovered o’er him a vision bright;
And he saw, as in a magical glass,
The far off future before him pass.

“Lo! the trees of his planting so stately grew.
They leaned their tops ’gainst the sky’s soft
blue,
While intertwining on every side
The giant branches stretched far and wide.
’Neath the lovely living arches span
The broad smooth highway level ran,
Its verdurous vistas stretching on
Till the power of the raptured eye was gone.



In his dreams he fell his knees upon,
And cried ' 'Tis the Highway of the Lord,
By seers foretold in His Holy Word!

“Nay! Behold a miracle wrought again
To show His power to the sons of men!
A mighty Cathedral here doth stand,
By no human builders upreared or planned;
Whose groined arches upward spring,
Like the souls of the faithful worshiping;
With carving and tracery fine and fair,
No mortal graver's could with it compare;

And through stained windows in wondrous
mood,

Glorious and changeful and rainbow-hued,
God's blessed sunshine doth pour and fall
Like a benediction upon it all!

“ In his long-lost youth had the friar strayed
'Neath the fair Alhambra's classic shade;
In Valombrosa's leafy bowers
He had roamed through happy moonlit hours,
And his glowing heart had felt the thrall
Of the great Cathedrals on it fall,
But never such weird resistless spell
As this gracious marvelous miracle.

“Then the vision shifted, and, behold!
A host, whose numbers could not be told,
Down the shadowy roadway hurrying press,
Like the Israelites from the wilderness.
And first in the long procession came
His own dear flock, whom he called by name,
And who passed him each with bended head
That his blessing hands might o’er them
spread.

The aged and youthful, the high and low,
Matron and maiden onward go;
To the marriage sacrament, side by side,
The happy bridegroom and blushing bride;

“Little children who gaily went
With their infant brows so innocent;
The tender babe on its mother’s breast
That the church’s chrism on it might rest;
Weeping penitents hasting to fall
At the comforting confessional;
While creeping onward sad and slow
A mournful funeral train doth go,
That solemn masses be sung and said
To cheer the living, give peace to the dead.
And the good priest blessed them all as they
 went
To the Church’s Holy Sacrament.

“But anon to the friar’s view there came,
A surging crowd of an unknown name.—
An endless, hurrying, jostling throng,
Full of laughter and jest and song,—
The tread of a myriad coming feet,
The ceaseless tide of a city’s street,
The stately coach and the lumbering wain;
And wheeléd wonders he could not explain,
Which came with rumble and rush and roar,
Swarming with people, behind, before,
Above, within, and under too,
For aught that the puzzled friar knew!

“Horsemen and footmen rushing past,
A river of travel so strange and vast
That Father de Catala’s patient eye
Too weary grew for observancy,
And the changing figures seemed to be
But the puppet shows of jugglery !
Only his dim eye still could see,
That many a fainting pilgrim stayed
For a blissful rest ’neath the pleasant shade ;
And he read in many a lingering eye
Sweet gratitude for his ministry,

“Or heard a benison bestowed
On the unknown builders of the road.

“Then an angel touched him and softly said,
‘A hundred years in thy dreams have fled !
Lift up thy eyes, and thou shalt know
The changes time shall surely show.’

“Then, far as his charmed gaze could stray,
The ‘Happy Valley’ all smiling lay.
Beautiful dwellings stood half revealed,
Yet by vine and blossom half concealed,
Lowliest cottage or lordliest hall
The clustering roses embrace them all.



“ For his dear familiar Mission home
The stately College high reared its dome;
While near and far in the sunny air
Fair church spires pointed the way of prayer ;
And ever still by the Church’s side
The Halls of Learning stood open wide.
O’er the sky of his dream his old words ran,
‘ For the glory of God and the good of man !’
Afar where the wild rank mustard grew
Shone the waving harvest’s golden hue,
While purple vintage and fruit-bowed tree
In the friar’s dream spread temptingly.

“ ‘The Garden of Eden !’ aloud he cried,
‘May no serpent of Evil there abide !’

“The matin bell was loudly ringing,—
‘Now may the dear saints pardon me,’
Cried the holy man from his pallet springing,
‘If my dream was wrought by Diablerie !’
He crossed himself on his bended knee,
And the peace of Heaven blessed him there,
As from guileless heart he breathed his prayer,
And cheerful rang his voice in the singing.

“The friar’s years went onward gliding,
But the beauteous Vision did ne’er depart,
Like an angel presence still abiding,
It cheered forever that faithful heart.
And those who loved him and shared his
going
To care for the willows day by day,
Would hear him say as he watched their
growing,
‘My blessed Vision ! My Beautiful Way!’



“Till the Pueblos rang with the grateful
praising

Of the road where the pleasant shadows
lay,

And the people named it in happy phrasing

‘The Alameda!’—The Beautiful Way!

“The Mission Fathers are gone,—

Peace to the saintly dead!

Its walls have crumbled down,

And the Neophytes all are fled.

“I too am my end anear,”

And the sere leaves shook anew,

“Falling are my brothers dear,—

But the Friar’s Vision was true!”

The Rune of the Tree was done,
But my thoughts still sang to me,
As leaves go whispering on
Though the breeze of the morn
doth flee.

Gone are the fathers all !
In the chapel's crypt they lie,
Where no tender rain may fall,
Or gleam from our sunny sky.

No sculptured marble doth show
Each old historic name;
No blazoned window doth glow
With the record of their fame,

But their living monument stands to-day
In The Alameda—The Beautiful Way !







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